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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the basic components of a quality summer compensatory program which includes (1) definite objectives, (2) planned, directed teaching, (3) division of responsibility, and (4) internal evaluation. The findings of the Westinghouse report on Head Start and the Ypsilanti Preschool Curriculum Demonstration Project are discussed. About half of the paper gives hints on how to teach and evaluate the language skills of disadvantaged children using examples suggested by Marjorie Kelly (who developed a teacher training mini-course) and Courtney Cazden, an expert on preschool language development. (DP)

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HOW TO MAKE A SUMMER HEAD START PROGRAM MAKE A DIFFERENCE[1]

by

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Titles of speeches usually give away the speaker's bias and assumptions. The title of this talk obviously reflects an assumption on my part that a summer Head Start program can make a difference--a difference that lasts--in children's learning and development.

This assumption flatly contradicts one of the major conclusions of the controversial national evaluation of Head Start by the Westinghouse Learning Corporation in 1969. The Westinghouse study concluded that summer Head Start programs were ineffective. It recommended that they be phased out as soon as possible and replaced by programs lasting at least one year.

The Westinghouse study was launched in 1969 at the request of the United States Office of Education in order to find out whether Head Start was working. Head Start had been operating all over the country since 1965, involving hundreds of thousands of children. But the Government had no objective evidence that Head Start was helping children, and so it turned to the Westinghouse Corporation to carry out a massive research study on Head Start programs.

For those people who supported Head Start and wanted to expand it, the results of the Westinghouse study were disappointing. These were some of the major findings:

(1) On a test of learning readiness, given just before first grade, children from a full-year Head Start program were superior to children from similar backgrounds who didn't go to Head Start. But they were only slightly superior.

(2) There was no difference at all on the school readiness test between children who got only a summer Head Start program and children from comparable backgrounds who got no Head Start at all.

(3) On another test, one measuring language ability, there was again no difference between the summer Head Start children and the no-Head-Start children.

The full-year Head Start children, on a few parts of the language test, were superior to children with no Head Start experience.

(4) The Westinghouse study also tested for self-concept--how children feel about themselves--which Head Start programs have stressed a great deal. Disappointingly, during the first 3 grades of school, neither the summer Head Start children nor the full-year Head Start children showed a stronger self-concept than the no-Head Start control group.

(5) The same kinds of results were found for desire to achieve in school, and for attitudes toward school, home, and age-mates. No significant differences between kids who got Head Start and kids who didn't.

The discouraging conclusion of the Westinghouse study was that, in general, Head Start programs didn't seem to make a difference in the child's later intellectual and social-emotional development.

There were individual Head Start programs, however, that were exceptions to this rule. Research began to zero in on the factors that determined whether a child's gains from Head Start are only temporary or long-lasting. One finding pointed out the importance of the parent. Children whose parents participated considerably in the Head Start program

held on to their gains better than children whose parents were not so involved. (One study by a special Federal preschool project in Tennessee found that the greatest gains in I.Q. were made not by the child in the preschool program, but by his younger brother or sister who was not in the program. The researchers concluded that their program's greatest value was to make the mothers more effective teachers of their younger children.)

Research has also identified the quality of the child's primary school as an important factor in determining whether Head Start gains last. Not surprisingly, Head Start children who go to good schools tend to maintain their gains, whereas children who go into poor schools do not. A study just completed by the Office of Education has shown that the most effective Follow Through kindergarten for Head Start children is one which emphasizes teaching school skills to the individual child, and which provides the child with lots of feedback--information about how he's progressing, constant reactions to what he does.

Sex also appears to be a significant variable. Girls make greater gains during Head Start than boys, and are more likely to maintain these gains in school. Observations of classrooms suggest that girls are more attentive in the early years. Video tapes of Head Start teachers show that they pay more attention to girls--probably because the girls are more attentive to begin with. More effort needs to be directed at stimulating the involvement of boys, who may need more external structure at this age than girls. Most parents will probably confirm that.

How about the curriculum that a preschool program uses? Does it make a difference in whether preschool gains hold up when the child enters school?

To answer this question, David Weikart began the Ypsilante Preschool Curriculum Demonstration Project in Michigan in the fall of 1967. Three different kinds of preschool programs were compared: a semi-structured cognitively-oriented program, stressing thinking and reasoning skills; a highly structured, drill-oriented language curriculum (very much like the Bereiter--Engleman program); and a relatively unstructured curriculum that stressed the social-emotional goals of the traditional nursery school.

The children in the three programs were low-income and also classified as "educable mentally retarded." Their I.Q.'s were about 80--which is lower than 85 out of 100 children in the general population.

Weikart's results were a great surprise. Here's what he found at the end of the first year:

(1) First, the I.Q. gains by these 3-4-year-old children were very large--25-30 points, which puts them above average in measured intelligence.

(2) Secondly, there were <u>no differences</u> in the size of I.Q. gains for the three different groups of children in the different curriculums. Independent ratings by teachers and outside examiners of children's overall functioning also showed no differences. The three seemingly very different approaches to preschool education had worked equally well.

Weikart's conclusion is a point that I would like to stress very much today--it's not what you do; it's how you do it. What made the three

different Ypsilante programs successful, Weikart believed, was what they had in common: careful planning, coordinated teaching, and regular evaluation of what was happening. All staff met frequently to define their objectives for the children in specific terms, to discuss how to achieve these objectives, and to decide whether in fact these objectives were being achieved.

It's possible, I think, for a summer Head Start program to make a long-range difference--despite the findings of the Westinghouse study. It will make a difference, however, only if it does those things which made the three Ypsilante programs a dramatic success. An effective summer program must:

(1) Define objectives for children. These must be stated in terms of observable behavior--things you can see children doing. The question here is: what do you want them to be able to do at the end of the program that they aren't doing at the beginning?

(2) Plan directed teaching--that is, teaching directed at helping children achieve the objectives you've defined. Let me stress that directed teaching is not the same as directive teaching--you don't have to sit the child down and make him do what you want him to do. Directed teaching can take many forms--large-group meetings, small-group instruction, one-to-one teacher-child interaction, or simply interaction between the child and a physical environment prepared by the teacher to direct him toward certain kinds of learning.

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What's important is that the teacher carry around clearly defined objectives in his or her head, and that these influence the teacher's teaching behavior--whatever form it takes.

The question to be answered here is two-fold:

(1) What teaching skills are needed to help the child achieve a given objective? and

(2) What kinds of learning activities should be planned to promote progress toward that objective?

(3) A third important component of a good program for children is clear division of responsibility. Everyone can't be responsible for all the learning that should go on in a good program. Somebody needs to zero in on specific language objectives, somebody else on perceptual-motor skills, etc.

(4) The fourth ingredient in this recipe for summer success--perhaps the most important--is evaluation. There's a tendency to think of evaluation as some high-powered psychologist coming in from the outside to give children a standardized test, like the ones used in the Westinghouse study. That's only one kind of evaluation. The kind of evaluation I'm talking about is "inside evaluation"--done by the people working in the program, for their purposes. The objective of this kind of evaluation is to get information about individual children's learning and development.

This kind of evaluation provides feedback to the teacher that enables the teacher to determine whether in fact she's achieving the objectives she wants to achieve. This kind of evaluation has to be built into a program. It has to be done regularly--often enough to allow teachers to

revise their behavior if objectives aren't being achieved. And you don't have to be a super-skilled evaluation specialist to collect information about children's learning. There are lots of good, simple techniques for evaluation.

To make this discussion more concrete, consider the area of language objectives. Children's acquisition of language skills is only part of a good program, but if your time is limited to a few summer weeks, emphasizing language development makes good sense. How a child talks--how anyone talks--is a very prominent characteristic. Talk is how human beings relate to each other, and it's through talk, largely, that they judge each other. The low-income child is typically behind most of his age-mates in language skill development, and that's one of the first things teachers pick up when the child enters school. First impressions, of course, play a large part in determining how much a teacher expects of a child. And what a teacher expects a child to learn plays a significant part in determining how much he will learn. Research has demonstrated this.

Before talking about evaluating children's language progress, let me take a step back and talk about defining language objectives and the teacher skills needed to achieve them.

A woman named Marjorie Kelly has developed a "mini-course" in teaching teachers the skills they need to promote language growth. Her mini-course is based upon 4 basic principles:

(1) Children will learn a new language if they feel the need for it--you've got to motivate them, and show them how they can use the new language skills to do something they want to do.

(2) Children learn language best when it is associated with something they already know or feel.

(3) They learn new language best through verbal interaction with verbally mature speakers.

(4) Language and thought are inter-dependent, and should be learned together.

Kelly then zeroes in on four areas of language development, and the teaching skills needed for each of these areas. These are all listed in the handout called, "Objectives and Specific Skills Covered in Minicourse #2."

Objective #1 is aimed at getting the child to extend his language--use phrases instead of sentences, for example--and make their language more precise. The language of beginning Headstart children is often characterized by:

(1) Short, very simple, often unfinished sentences

(2) Very little use of adjectives and adverbs

(3) very little use of complex sentences, such as, "When I'm finished playing blocks, I will paint," as opposed to, "I'm playing blocks. I'll paint after."

Here's an example of extending a phrase:

Teacher: "Where's the truck?"

CHILD: "Over there."

TEACHER: "Yes, the truck is on the shelf by the window."

Here's an example of refining meaning, or making the child's language more precise:

CHILD (referring to a cloth): "It's bumpy."

TEACHER: "Yes, the cloth is rough." (Note: teacher doesn't tell child he's wrong, but models the correct response.)

Objective #2 is aimed at getting the teacher to use praise more precisely, omitting the personal element. Suppose a child who yesterday learned the word "vehicle" picks up a truck, shows it to the teacher, and says, "vehicle." According to Objective #2, instead of saying "Very good" or "Right" or "Fine," the teacher should say "Very good, you remembered to use the new word, vehicle."

What are the benefits of such precise praise?

(1) The child knows specifically why he's being praised.

(2) Other children can hear and understand the praise and are more likely, if the praise is specific, to imitate the behavior which earned the praise.

(3) It is more of a tribute to the child to point the praise at his accomplishment rather than to merely indicate that the teacher is pleased.

Consider the difference between:

"I like the way you described the fish."

and

"Very good, you told me the color and the size of the fish."

Objective #3 of Kelly's language growth program is to develop positional awareness in the child. If a child is asked, for example, "Where is the farm puzzle?" and says simply, "Over there," he may lack an awareness of the varied spatial characteristics of the external environment and his relation to it. "Over there" could refer to lines and angles (in the corner), sequential ordering (on the second shelf), or similarity between objects (with the other toys). So, when the child says, "Over there," the teacher should model a higher level of linguistic precision about space: "Yes, it's over there in the corner, on the second shelf, with the other toys."

A fourth language objective is to get the child to identify and describe action. Research has shown that children from minimal language backgrounds typically do not use "action" verbs. They will try to show rather than tell the teacher what happened. A kindergarten teacher once asked her children, all from poor homes, what the bus driver did on the way to school that morning when it started to rain. The children all held up their arms and moved them back and forth across their bodies--representing the motion of windshield wipers. They were aware of the action, but had no label for it.

How can you tell about the effects of your program on language skills such as these? There are at least 3 ways of getting information:

(1) eavesdropping on children as they talk to each other while doing a puzzle or playing in the doll corner. How often does a particular child direct a statement at another child? How often does he use an action verb? How often does he describe what's he's doing? Use an adjective? The best evaluation data are frequency data--how often something occurred. You can use a simple check list, or even a wrist golf counter--which leaves your hands free for something else.

(2) A teacher may also listen to children's language as they respond to a teacher—directed situation such as reading a story or having a snack. One teacher can read while another listens and records.

(3) Structured task situations are a third way that teachers can evaluate a child's language skills. Structured situations are often more efficient--because they test for skills that the child might not display spontaneously when you are around to hear them.

Let me give you some examples taken from a paper by Courtney Cazden, a leading expert on preschool language development. She points out that it's hard to tell whether children can understand passive sentences such as "The girls is being pulled by the boy." Kids don't often use the passive form in their natural conversations. So there's a simple picture test you can give the child--and an example is provided by handout #6. You can add 2 decoy pictures to this to control for guessing.

You say to the child, "I'm going to tell you about these pictures. When I'm done, you point to the right picture. The girl is being pulled by the boy. Now point to the picture where the girl is being pulled by the boy." Of course, you can vary this kind of task to test for understanding of other things as well--"Point to the picture where the cat is under the chair", for example.

You can use the same pictures to test for and teach <u>production</u> of the language, not just understanding of it. Here the directions are, "I will tell you about these pictures. When I'm done, you copy me. Ready? Listen. The baby is sleeping. The baby is not sleeping. Now, what's this picture? What's this one?"

Handout #5 is a Language Lotto checklist. Language Lotto is a commercially available game that can be used to assess abilities to use certain kinds of prepositions, relational phrases ("part of ") and -ing words, like kicking. Langauge Lotto can also be used as a learning activity, because it's a game that can be played again and again.

Cazden recommends something put out by Educational Testing Service called Let's Look at First Graders. It has many activities that can be used both for evaluation and learning.

Handout #8 is another example of a structured language test--a very clever one. It tests for children's ability to generalize a grammatical rule by giving them nonsense words.

Examples:

(1) Progressive. Man balancing a ball on his nose. "This is a man who knows how to zib. What is he doing? He is _____."

(2) Past tense. Man with a steaming pitcher on his head. "This is a man who knows how to spow. . . . He did the same thing yesterday. What did he do yesterday? Yesterday he _____."

(3) Possessive. One animal wearing a hat. "This is a niz who owns a hat. Whose hat is it" It is the _____hat."

(4) Third person singular. Man shaking an object. "This is a man who knows how to naz. . . . He does it every day. . . . Every day he _____."

Handout #7 is an example of a test that uses real geometric forms to test various kinds of language understandings. The child must translate the tester's instructions into an action response, and to do this must understand various kinds of grammatical structures.

There are many more such procedures for evaluating language growth==I will soon have a few extra copies of Cazden's whole paper, from which these examples were taken, if you would like one. The important thing now is to start planning objectives--Handout #1 lists a wide range of these--and then start finding out where your program's children are now--before you've been underway for long. Even if you can only do a little bit of evaluation at the beginning, that's fine. Do what you can. But you need some measures of children's abilities soon so you can tell at the end of the summer how much they've learned.

This may sound as if you'd be spending all your time evaluating, and not much teaching. But that's not so. You only need to sample children's learning once in a while--and chart their progress, on an individual basis. And above all--use your evaluation information to plan your teaching, and plan regularly. It's well worth the time, and it's a lot more effective than "playing it by ear."